

Children receive the gift of family

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MOUNT CLEMENS — There were tears shed in the Macomb County Juvenile Court Nov. 25, but unlike many days in court, these were tears of joy.

Four families started new lives together when the court participated in Michigan Adoption Day, finalizing adoptions that many had worked for years to bring to fruition.

Judge Mark Switalski presided over the adoptions, which he said were a welcome change from his normal caseload in the county family court.

"In my 15 years as a judge I had never done adoptions, so this was a real pleasure," Switalski said.

Switalski felt especially honored to preside over the adoptions, as he and his wife, Judy Casalou-Switalski, are adoptive parents of three children from Poland.

"The whole experience is more emotions," Switalski said. "More love, more anger, more joy, and every day has been better than the last."

Michigan Adoption Day was organized by the Michigan Supreme Court and Family Independence Agency to bring attention to the many children who are in need of permanent, loving homes.

More than 200 children were placed in permanent homes Nov. 25 during adoptions held at 33 county courts.

But the number is small when compared to the 12,710 children in temporary custody of the state as of September.

Last year, the FIA placed 2,833 children in permanent homes; 90 percent of them were placed with relatives.

According to the FIA, 54 percent of the children adopted were 6 or older, and 80 percent were adopted with at least one sibling.

A trend during the past nine years shows a steady incline in the number of adoptions in Michigan. In 1993, 1,959 children were adopted, while 2,833 were placed in 2002.

Angelo Nicholas, director of the Macomb County Family Independence Agency, said that most of the children in foster care are the children of parents who have had their parental rights terminated for various reasons, including abuse.

"It's a rewarding job but also difficult, because a lot of times we get older kids, and they are more difficult to be adopted by families," Nicholas said. "Adoption offers the value of raising children, and these children need stability, care and affections. Every child needs a family."

Four children received the gift of a loving family in Janet (last names have been omitted at the court's request), of Mount Clemens, who finally saw her adoption of her grandchildren that day.

Janet gained custody of her grandchildren three years ago, but, like many families going through the adoption process, was unable to adopt them for several years.

"It's good to get here," Janet said. "It's been a long time coming, and thank God it's over. We have a lot to be thankful for this Thanksgiving."

Janet said getting used to the children has been challenging, as her own two children are now grown.

"It's made the house way different," Janet said with a laugh. "It's voices — a lot of voices."

Those voices will now become those of children with a permanent home, as Alondria, Dakaila, Deriana and Alontez spend the years growing with their grandmother.

“She’s a nice grandma,” Deriana said. “I like when she lets me go in her room and watch movies.”

After the adoptions were finalized, the children each received a gift bag with a stuffed animal, T-shirt and books inside, and the participants posed for their first official family picture.

For more information about children waiting for adoption, visit www.mare.org, or www.michigan.gov/fia, and click on “adoption.”

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Janet, third from right, of Mount Clemens, adopted her four grandchildren during the Nov. 25 Michigan Adoption Day event. Pictured left to right are Janet’s daughter Teahana, 15, and her grandchildren Deriana, 6, Alondria, 5, Dakaila, 4, and Alontez, 9.

C&G Newspapers and Deb Jacques